

NEW RIVER CONSERVANCY

Strategic Plan 2026–2030

*Focused stewardship, strategic partnerships, and measurable impact
across North Carolina, Virginia, and West Virginia.*



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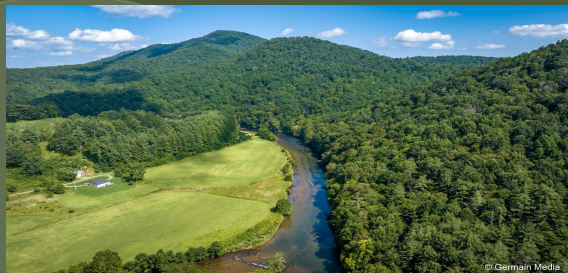
6
Goals

The Process

May 2025- July 2026

In Partnership with Spark Mills, with NRC Staff Lead Stella Cybulski

*Building the Strategic Plan Through Listening,
Reflection and Alignment*



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Approach

Preparation (Spring - Summer 2025)

Secured Funding, selected Spark Mills as consulting partner, established project leadership and governance structure

Phase 1: Gather Information (July - November 2025)

Collected organizational insights through document review, staff and board retreats, volunteer engagement, stakeholder conservationist and strategic planning team discussions.

Phase 2: Interpret & Theme Analysis (Winter 2025 - 2026)

Analyzed findings to identify recurring patterns, strengths, opportunities and organizational priorities

Phase 3: Build & Refine (February - July 2026)

Developed strategic goals, validated priorities with leadership and the board, and drafted the final strategic plan.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



Broad Stakeholder
Participation



Shared Organization
Understanding



Clearly Defined
Strategic Priorities



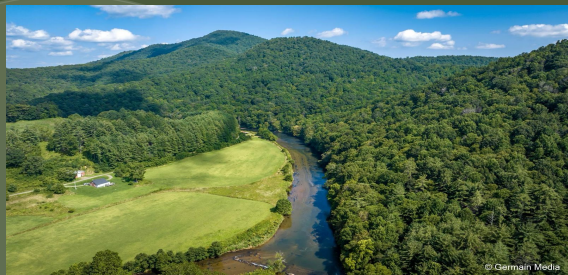
Strong Foundation For
Implementation

01

GOAL

Strengthening Organizational Foundation and Resilience

Build the internal capacity to support effective, sustainable stewardship



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STRATEGIES

Clarify Organizational Focus

Refine mission alignment, organizational role, and strategic priorities to guide programs, partnerships, and decision-making.

Strengthen Governance and Leadership

Clarify board and staff roles, responsibilities, and decision-making. Establish succession planning and cross-training.

Improve Organizational Systems

Develop sustainable processes for volunteer management, program coordination, data management, and GIS integration.

Align Resources with Strategic Priorities

Develop staffing and resource plans tied to strategic goals. Promote sustainable workloads and role clarity.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

● Staff role clarity & workload balance

● Stronger governance continuity

● Reduced operational strain

● Efficient cross-program systems

02

GOAL

Advance Community-Centered Watershed Stewardship

Deepen community engagement to protect and restore the New River Watershed



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STRATEGIES

Strengthen Stewardship Programs

Expand initiatives improving water quality, habitat restoration, river access, debris removal, and ecological resilience.

Expand Community Engagement

Increase opportunities for volunteers, residents, and students. Develop inclusive pathways for civic engagement and environmental education.

Build Strategic Partnerships

Strengthen relationships with municipalities, nonprofits, educational institutions, agencies, and community organizations.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



Increased volunteer participation



Stronger cross-sector partnerships



Expanded ecological outcomes



Greater public awareness

03

GOAL

Expand Strategically Across the Tri-State Watershed

*Intentional, differentiated engagement in
NC, VA, and WV*



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STRATEGIES

Define State-Specific Growth Frameworks

Identify priority regions, ecological focus areas, and partnership opportunities within each state.

Clarify Organizational Roles

Establish criteria for when NRC should lead, partner, support, or delegate stewardship efforts across geographies.

Embrace Strategic Restraint

Recognize that saying no to an opportunity when it doesn't support our strategic goals, or when there is limited capacity can build stronger long-term impact and sustainability.

Establish Meaningful Presence

Define effective and sustainable engagement in each state without assuming identical scale or structure.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

● Intentional geographic
distribution

● Stronger state-level
partnerships

● Consistent decision
criteria

● Sustainable
mission-aligned growth

04

GOAL

Elevate Impact Measurement and Organizational Visibility

Demonstrate watershed impact with transparency and credibility



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STRATEGIES

Develop a Unified Impact Framework

Align watershed metrics such as acres protected, miles restored, trash removed, volunteer engagement, water quality monitoring sites and trees planted within a cohesive framework.

Create a Public-Facing Impact Dashboard

Develop accessible, real-time reporting tools using storytelling, mapping, and data visualization.

Strengthen Leadership Presence

Expand NRC's visibility in regional forums, media, conferences, and mission-aligned policy discussions.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



Transparent program reporting



Increased funder confidence



Greater public recognition



Accessible organizational data

05

GOAL

Achieve Long-Term Financial Sustainability

Build a diversified financial foundation for long-term mission fulfillment



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STRATEGIES

Diversify Revenue Streams

Expand across foundations, grants, public funding, major donors, memberships, corporate partnerships, and earned revenue.

Develop Multi-Year Financial Projections

Align financial planning with strategic priorities and operational capacity over a sustained horizon.

Increase Recurring and Multi-Year Funding

Reduce revenue volatility through longer-term commitments from funders and partners.

Align Financial Decision-Making

Ensure all financial investments reflect long-term sustainability and strategic discipline.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



Balanced and predictable revenue



Increased multi-year funding



Strategic financial alignment



Improved financial resilience

06

GOAL

Strengthen Membership Engagement and Loyalty

*Deepen relationships with members as
long-term stewardship partners*



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STRATEGIES

Clarify the Role of Membership

Define how membership advances NRC's mission, stewardship efforts, and community impact across the watershed.

Expand Recognition and Pathways

Broaden communication, volunteer opportunities, and stewardship pathways that connect members to outcomes.

Strengthen Storytelling and Engagement

Connect members directly to watershed outcomes and organizational impact through compelling narratives.

Build Pathways for Long-Term Investment

Develop stronger channels for member advocacy, retention, and long-term giving.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

● Improved member
retention

● Increased stewardship
participation

● Stronger community
loyalty

● Membership supports
impact narrative

Implementation

How We Will Put the Strategic Plan into Practice

Actionable steps towards future development



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Elements

Choose Your Champion for Each Strategy

Major roles and players will be established for each strategy. Distinguishing between the owner and the manager of priority work will improve staff capacity, buy in, and accountability.

Develop Annual Objectives for each Strategy

Through annual objectives and quarterly check-ins, we will pursue and adjust our indicators of success. As the organization grows and develops, annual objectives and metrics for success will be updated to reflect progress by our Champions and organizations leaders.

Implementation Cycle

Lead by our champions, NRC teams will develop timelines and milestones for each goal. Some goals will be ongoing throughout the planned 5 years with milestone markers while others will have more discrete beginnings and ends.

Major Roles beyond NRC Staff

Throughout the course of this process, several major players beyond the NRC staff will have great impact on the success of these goals and strategies. The Board of Directors, Volunteers, Donors and Partners will be key and their roles will be defined by our Champions and NRC Leadership.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS



Integrated into Annual Planning



Clear Accountability



Measured progress towards outcomes



Stronger Partnership and Community Trust

What will success look like?

Implementation *EXAMPLE*

Goal 4.2: Create a Public-Facing Impact Dashboard

Develop accessible, real-time reporting tools using storytelling, mapping, and data visualization.



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An EXAMPLE of what is possible

Choosing a Champion – *Water Watchers Program Manager*

The Water Watcher program manager is a perfect person to lead an effort that takes the water quality data recovered through the program and develop an interactive online data portal that interprets the program's value to the public, funders and partner agencies.

Annual Objectives & Implementation Cycle

There are three components to this work: Gathering the Data, Building the Dashboard and Maintaining the Dashboard. Each component will have unique objectives, milestones and processes. The Water Watchers program manager will be the lead in ensuring that all necessary partners are well engaged, share a clear goal picture, and understand their role in a larger process.

Major Roles Beyond NRC Staff

The Goal Champion will have to coordinate and recruit volunteer water watchers, engage data management and web design partners, maintain online products and leverage outcomes with new funders. Our champion must ensure that the product is valuable to NRC constituents, State Agencies and key foundations. Volunteers, board members, agency partners and the NRC marketing team all have a role.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

● Data displayed online

● Tell our story

● Leverage for long-term funding

● Engage new partners

What will success look like?

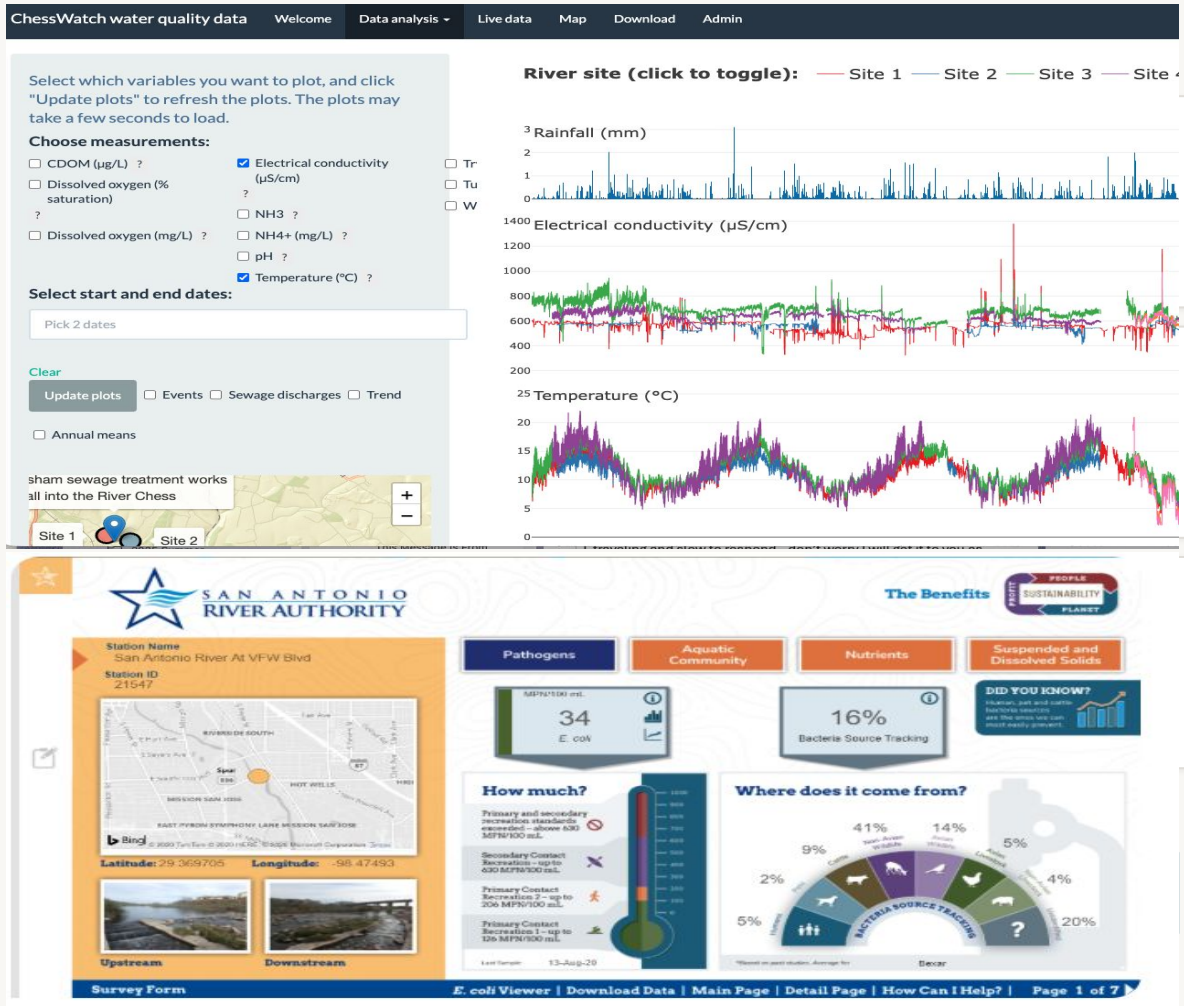
Example: *Water Watchers Data Portal*

Goal 4.2: Create a Public-Facing Impact Dashboard

Develop accessible, real-time reporting tools using storytelling, mapping, and data visualization.



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Gaps and Fundamentals

Early barriers to long-term success

Structural barriers and necessary next steps have been identified that should be addressed to maximize the work of the NRC and our ability to achieve plan goals.



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Structural Improvements that drive success

A Full-time Director of Development

With much of the donor engagement, campaign strategy, public communication, event planning, marketing and social media management falling on the shoulders of 1.25 full-time staff, a critical early-step is to add capacity in development, so the Champions identified for this work have the capacity for success

A Functional Home for Operations

While NRC's work is expanding, physical needs for equipment storage, staff workspace and vehicle parking are lacking. Staff need physical space in all three states to efficiently manage the work ahead.

Marketing to Connect

The prioritization of marketing strategies and elements that unify the watershed, activate new audience categories and connect everyone to the work of the New River Conservancy is vital to the NRC's ability to strengthen our storytelling in ways that build capacity and regular donor engagement.

Projects that Transform the Watershed

Maintaining an ability to significantly improve the watershed is critical to the NRC's ability to strengthen our partnerships, establish a leadership presence and build pathways to long-term success while staying true to our historical identity.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

● Key Staff Additions

● Functional Space

● Strategic Marketing

● Meaningful Impact

Where will Success Take Us?

Visions for the Future at The New River Conservancy



Offices in West Jefferson, Virginia and West Virginia

Our offices are accessible to the community, visible points of interest, and functional workspaces that allow staff to store gear, plan workdays, and coordinate partnership focused activities across a wide spectrum of work tasks.

New Staff in New Positions

A Director of Development coordinates meaningful campaigns with a Land Protection director to identify critical needs of the New River and fund action. Each summer an intrepid team of adventurers embark on the New River Expedition, which captures the imagination of future paddlers, members and donors.

Standardized Programs, Diversified Impact Across Three States

A clean-up in Lansing, N.C. operates similarly to a clean-up in Lansing, W.V. and water watchers collect data in Boone in the same way they do in Beckley. The data is applied to solving different problems, unique to the priorities in each state.

An Engaged, Activated and Excited Membership Base

Throughout the watershed, the New River Conservancy is a household name synonymous with science-based action, a deep connection to the New River and a recognized member all communities, from the neighborhood level to the State Legislature.

